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AUTHOR Patterson, Wade N.; DeVille, Anthony P.
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study of an organization development intervention with an eight-person teaching-support-administrative team in a suburban elementary school. Data for the study were gathered through observation by two participant-observers, through interviews with all eight direct participants in the team-building project, and through a sample of other staff members, parents, and students from the school. Interviews conducted one month after departure of the external consultant revealed that the team showed improvement in task orientation, communication, time utilization, conflict management, collaboration, openness, and personal and professional relationships. A second set of interviews conducted 11 months after the consultation ended found equivalent or improved results on 11 of the 15 outcomes noted in the first interviews. (Author/JG)

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TEAM BUILDING OD INTERVENTIONS AND OUTCOMES IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL

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by

Wade N. Patterson
California State University, Hayward

and

Anthony P. DeVille
Millbrae Elementary School District, California

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate outcomes of Organizational Development (OD) team building interventions with one teaching-support-administrative team in a suburban public elementary school attended by children from lower-middle and upper-lower income families.

Introduction

Documented OD team building efforts have resulted in considerably more attempts and successful outcomes in industrial settings than in school settings.[1] The literature is sparse, but some investigators claim that the application of known and newly generated team building techniques can result in significant changes for students and adults associated with

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schools.[2] Less evidence is available for schools attended by relatively lower income students. In any setting, perceived and measured "success" of outcomes is dependent on combining human, goal, process, and intervention variables.

Based upon these assumptions, the following questions were developed for describing process and some observable outcomes in this study:

Q1 What were the entry diagnosis, goal setting, and decision making processes employed for the OD team building project?

Q2 What interventions were employed?

Q3 What were the short range outcomes of the project?

- 3A Collaboration, openess, and other norms.
- 3B Outcomes and other indicators of changes.
- 3C Problem-solving, conflict management, and team performance during "smooth" and "rough periods" of time.
- 3D Other observable changes.

Q4 What were the longer range outcomes of the project?

- 4A Collaboration, openess, and other norms.
- 4B Outcomes and other indicators of changes.
- 4C Problem-solving, conflict management, and team performance during "smooth" and "rough periods" of time.
- 4D Other observable changes.

Q5 What were the differences between short and longer range outcomes?

Method

The study questions were used to help gather data for a descriptive case study of the OD team building project and

some of the perceived and measured outcomes.

The data were gathered through observation by two participant observers and by interviews with all team building project participants as well as a sample of other faculty and staff members, parents, and students from the school. Other documents that indicated possible changes or other team building project outcomes were also examined for the study.

One participant observer was the external consultant for the team building project and the other was the principal of the participating school as well as a full time member of the project team. Field notes were taken during the team building process. Interviews were held with respondents one month after process with the external consultant had been completed (short range). The second and last series of interviews were held eleven months after the external consultant completed his work with the team (longer range).

Case Study

The Setting

Lomita Park Elementary School serves approximately 300 kindergarten through sixth grade students in the Millbrae Elementary School District. The suburban community and school district include all of the San Francisco International Airport which is located approximately fifteen miles south of the city of San Francisco.

The students are about evenly divided between boys and girls. Almost one-fourth represent minority groups. The students at Lomita Park collectively represent the lowest family income

of Millbrae's nine elementary and junior high schools. Student mobility is relatively high although 25 percent of the present sixth grade class has been in the school since kindergarten.

The teaching staff totals fourteen. Forty percent have been at the school for three years or less, another 40 percent from four to nine years, and the other 20 percent have taught in the school from 10 to 14 years. Half of the teachers have been in the district ten or more years. A principal appointed in 1971, seven paid teaching aides, various volunteer aides, a part time nurse, a custodian, food service people, and a secretary complete the staff.

The physical plant is the most recent of three located on the same site serving the neighborhood community. It was completed in 1971 and may be described as an "open space" plant with movable interior walls and an accoustically controlled environment. The organizational structure is also "open" with three "pods" accommodating thirteen classroom "equivalencies." Pods I, II, and III are preformal and informal designations. A library, multipurpose room, and outdoor facilities accommodate flexible grouping and nongraded programs.

Entry Phase for the Team Building Project

A new member was added to the teaching team in Pod III at Lomita Park Elementary School. She was added to the team six weeks before the team building project began--thus making five members on the team. She discussed strengths and weaknesses of the team and its learning program at team meetings, at lunch and elsewhere with the other four members and the principal. She

transferred from a junior high school after having taught there for seven and one-half years in the same school district. She previously knew some of Lomita Park teachers and the principal long before her transfer which resulted from an invitation by the principal to join the teaching faculty. Concurrent with her teaching, she had been a part time master's candidate for a year and one-half at CSUH in reading supervision. She became familiar with OD and team building at the university. Two months after coming to Lomita Park she spoke informally with two of her team members about the possibility of team building for their team. Her colleagues were receptive and she explained their thinking to the principal who became enthusiastic and added ideas of his own. The other two members of the immediate team were included in the agreement although one had strong reservations. The initiating teacher then asked the external consultant, a professor of educational administration from her university, to explore a team building project with them. Preliminary arrangements were made and the consultant visited the school for the first time following telephone conversations with the principal. By telephone they agreed to include two support teachers: the Learning Disability Group teacher and the Title I, ESEA teacher.

Two weeks later, the consultant arrived to gather data and explain his perception of team building to all eight potential team building participants. Much of his conversation with the reluctant teacher and the two support teachers was for explanation and entry purposes. The three people were still reluctant, but agreed to give the team building project "a trial." The other five persons appeared ready to begin with two of them

expressing considerable nervousness at the prospect of their participation in team building.

The informal entry phase with at least three team members in the project lasted through the first four-hour team building session. This was probably the turning point between continuation or collapse of the project.

Project Diagnosis

The consultant's initial visit to the school for entry purposes included five hours of observation and conversations in the team's Pod and elsewhere in the building. It took place during the normal teaching day and included a regularly scheduled Pod III team meeting when classes ended at 3:00 P.M. The day gave the consultant a broad picture of relationships, processes, problems, strengths, attitudes, and behaviors. He explained other team building objectives and processes outcomes to all participants. The consultant and team members began to develop tentative objectives.

Later the consultant worked on the design for the project. By telephone, he discussed tentative objectives and design for the project with another OD consultant, a business management professor at California State University, Chico.

In another fifteen days, the consultant returned to continue the diagnosis through observation and informal discussions. He discussed a tentative design with several individual team members as well as with most of them at a team meeting in an attempt to get genuine "joint ownership" of the project as well as provide the most applicable design for this particular participating team. This visit by the consultant lasted approximately four hours starting at noon.

The first five hour and the second four hour diagnosis of the team and its setting by the participating team members and the consultant were considered to be as minimal in time as possible to achieve the desired results. It included efforts by the consultant to: observe team members interact with students and colleagues; observe their effect on one another; become acquainted with each of them and discuss their feelings, goals, satisfactions, problems, and ideas; obtain a sense of the organizational climate; observe ways which the organization facilitated and constrained faculty members activities leading to student learning; and generally look at some individual and collective inputs, processes, and outputs. The consultant recorded data and impressions when he felt no one would be uneasy about it. During the few other times he waited until later to write his notes.

Further diagnoses were made by the consultant during the three four hour team building sessions. The eight team members, who were all trained as process observers assumed more quantity and quality diagnosis each session. This was accomplished during the sessions with the consultant present and between sessions without his presence.

Among the data collected:

1. The inability of the team to remain on task during meetings,
2. No established avenues for team members to express conflicts within the team,
3. No working procedure for meetings,
4. Poor use of planning time,
5. Seldom any follow-up or action taken on agreements, and
6. Avoidance of problems, conflicts, and differing opinions by team members.

Project Objectives

Final agreement between the eight team members and the external consultant resulted in five project objectives:

A) To reduce or eliminate usual problems of keeping a team together over a year and longer.

B) To capitalize on the most positive aspects of teams including the ability to rise above the level of the most effective member of the team on specific and collective tasks.

C) To develop conflict management skills in all members of the team in order that each will be able to deal successfully with problems and conflicts; and to be able to jointly work through times when the "going is rough."

D) To assess the potential contributions and needs which each individual brings to the team.

E) To increase the ability of the team to combine human and material resources to increase success in reaching goals by students, team members, and other staff members.

Project Process

The tentative design was altered slightly by the consultant as the result of the second and last day of diagnosis before the first of three tightly programmed team building sessions began. The sessions were held in a small meeting room with a "Do not disturb" sign on it. A site away from the school did not appear possible because of a need to hold time and monetary expenses to a minimum. The carpeted, glass-walled room had nine soft chairs arranged in a circle for the first session. A work table was placed in the middle of the room for part of the second and third sessions. The ninth chair was used by the consultant who participated as a team member so often that he was referred to as a quasi-team member by other participants in the project.

Each session was held on Thursday afternoon starting at 2:15 P.M. at the close of regularly scheduled minimum day across

the district which was devoted to planning and in-service. All three sessions ended at 6:15 P.M. according to prior agreement of twelve hours of team building sessions.

The first session was held approximately two weeks after the external consultant's second day of diagnosis. The advance design called for a medium intensity micro-laboratory that would create unusually frequent interactions between all members, thus making it possible for them to know one another and deal directly with one another much more than before. It also allowed members to experience and practice group process and communication skills.

Finally, the micro-laboratory helped integrate the two support teachers, the principal, and the consultant into the existing five member teaching team.

It consisted of a series of tightly conducted exercises, each followed by a general discussion and debriefing of points suggested by the consultant. The consultant announced the exercise, its time limit, its ground rules, and its purpose before each new round.

A discussion of the overall reactions and learning was held. A process evaluation sheet was duplicated (see Appendix A) and passed out to each person by the consultant with instructions for use in team meetings and other meetings held before the next team building meeting two weeks away. This ended session one.

The second session started with two minutes to recapture the mood of the last meeting. Then an exercise in one-to-one clearing and dealing with any real problem or subject was held. If nothing was available to deal with at the time, the members could make arrangements to deal with each other or the problem at a future time outside the group. Each discussion lasted five

minutes and members rotated among one another until every person had dealt directly with each of the others. Any personal or professional item was endorsed in advance by all members for clearing.

A lecturette on interpersonal and group directness, conflict management, and conflict avoidance was given by the consultant. A team discussion followed and was then opened up for discussion of any problems with any member or members of the team. All others not directly involved acted as facilitators whenever possible during the discussions.

A role definition planning session for each person in relating to all others was held. Each person was asked to write out, unsigned, what could be done to improve the team's overall performance on "typical tasks."

A series of exercises designed to provide experience in direct dealing with conflicts were held. One-to-one, one-to-group, and group-to-group were the focus. Agreements to deal with problems and conflicts as early as possible were discussed and plans were made to test the agreements during the coming three weeks.

A team exercise called "Tower Building" was held with two process observers taking notes to feed back to the participants at the end. In addition to the types of observations reflected on the Meeting Evaluation Sheet (See Appendix A) the process observers and consultant focused such things as: natural emergent leadership, team resources, informal and formal team structure, team strengths and weaknesses. Who did what, individual vs. team effectiveness, and team effectiveness on the task were examined.

Each participant was asked to look at the organization, its decision, and its orientation. What people can expect from each

other was discussed and informal agreements were made.

The principal and other team members dealt with power and collaborative decision-making next. Clarification of the role of each team member as well as other teachers, team leaders, interns and coordinators was completed.

A team planning session on some issues generated in the meeting was held using force field analysis as a decision-making and planning technique. As was the case in various work sessions, two team members served as process observers. Feedback of data from the process observers was accomplished. Some further agreements for action during the next three weeks were made and assignments were clarified to close out the session.

Three weeks later the third and final team building session was held with the consultant. Discussion of actions since the last meetings and reports by process observers who took notes during all of the team work sessions was completed.

The NASA "Lost on the Moon" exercise in group decision-making was conducted, with process observers focusing on similar items as the Tower Building Exercise. An additional focus on consensus, influence, technical uses, emotions, conflict reducing techniques, and use of differences in decision-making was examined for one hour.

A series of team agreements for procedures and tasks throughout the rest of the school year was worked through and put in writing. A self-analysis of strengths and needs by each person was conducted and duplicated in print as a team resource guide. Some specific ways of capitalizing on team strengths were examined.

A discussion of further means of developing the team resulted in the setting of a series of regular meetings with some task and process procedures established.

Further problem solving procedures and conflict management process was formally agreed upon to conclude the final session.

Short Range Outcomes

One month after the third and last team building session was completed, there were several outcomes recorded by the two participant observes and interviews with the respondents.

1. Procedures were set and a person was designated to keep team members on task during team meetings. Working agendas and priorities were clearly set for meetings and follow-up of the meetings.
2. Communication between team embers on personal and work related topics increased "greatly." All eight persons identified as team members. Listening was improved.
3. Time utilization in teaching and in team meetings was enhanced because of the awareness and skills used to complete tasks.
4. Conflict management was followed by a general agreement and practice of "clearing" problems and conflicts as soon as possible after appearance.
5. Team and sub-team meetings to plan and act on plans became normal as did action and collaboration in twos and threes.
6. "Clearing," "dealing with," and "working through" personal and work related interests became a norm. Less holding back of resentment and information also became evident. "Rough times" were "smoothed out."
7. Team members became visible to each other on a regular basis.
8. Personal and professional relationships between team members became closer. Some evidence of increased distance between team members and other faculty members was noted.
9. The diagnosis of individual team member strengths and weaknesses showed signs of being utilized to advantage on team tasks.

10. Student communication with team embers improved individually and generally. Teachers were able to readily facilitate student suggestions and other input to otner teachers.
11. Many students felt that they were treated with more personal dignity by team members.
12. Students felt that team ember willingness and ability to solve "difficult" person-to-person problems was enhanced. More student involvement was noted.
13. A generally more "open," "accepting" and "less judgemental," climate for students resulted in small and larger group class situations.
14. Group mean scores on mathematical achievement tests increased an average of 40% on mathematical computation skills. No other acievement tests were given during the school year.
15. Other faculty and staff members reported increased openness, accessibility, and collaboration on specific tasks.

Longer Range Outcome Differences

Eleven months after the team building sessions were completed the following outcomes were recorded:

1. This remained the same as the short range outcome.
2. This improved slightly from the short range outcome.
3. This improved slightly from the short range outcome.
4. This improved considerably from the short range outcome.
5. This remained the same as the short range outcome.
6. This improved slightly from the short range outcome.
7. This remained the same for six members of the team and regressed slightly for two members.

8. This increased slightly between five team members and regressed slightly for three. Distance between team members and most other faculty members became more pronounced.
9. This remained the same as the short range outcome.
10. This improved considerably from the short range outcome.
11. This improved slightly from the short range outcome.
12. This improved considerably from the short range outcome. Student behavior problems were "successfully dealt with by the team."
13. This improved slightly from the short range outcome.
14. No further testing occurred after the short range outcomes were measured.
15. This regressed slightly from the short range outcome.

Footnotes

[1] David G. Bowers, "OD Techniques and Their Results in 23 Organizations: The Michigan ICL Study," The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1973. C. Brooklyn Derr at the meeting of the Organizational Development Network of the NTL-Institute, Snowbird, Utah, October, 1974. Robert T. Golembiewski, Renewing Organizations, F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., Itasca, Ill., 1972. Newton Marguiles and Anthony P. Ra'a, Organizational Development, McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York, 1972.

[2] Richard Arends, et al, Organizational Development: Building Human Systems in Schools, Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, Eugene, Oregon, 1974. Wade N. Patterson, "Recent Evidence on OD," AERA Abstracts, Washington, D.C., 1974. Richard A. Schmuck, Philip J. Runkel, et al, Handbook of OD in Schools, National Press Books, Palo Alto, California, 1972.

APPENDIX A

MEETING EVALUATION SHEET

Evaluate this meeting on the following scales by rating each item from 1 to 7 (7 being ideal).

LISTENING

1. People talked past each other, little genuine attempt to understand others. (1) _____ Careful listening to other's views. (7)

OPENNESS

2. Discussion was polite, cautious, views held little conviction. (1) _____ Ideas expressed with candor, differences threshed out. (7)

ORGANIZATION

3. Discussion was disorganized and rambled from point to point. (1) _____ Discussion was kept on track by chairman, plus self-discipline of members. (7)

PARTICIPATION

4. Meeting was dominated by a few who "bulldozed" their points through. (1) _____ Lively interplay, many members contributed, absence of domination. (7)

DECISIONS

5. Decisions were made by compromise and capitulation. (1) _____ Decisions made by team wide understanding, people were willing to change positions in order for group to move ahead (7)

ATMOSPHERE

6. The atmosphere of the meeting was tense, strained, somewhat unpleasant, flat. (1) _____ The atmosphere was satisfying, challenging, stimulating. (7)

ACTION ORIENTATION

7. The group tended to needlessly postpone making a decision and to duck tough questions. (1) _____ The meeting was action oriented, and we accomplished all that was possible at this time. (7)

TRUST

8. We act as though we are highly suspicious of one another. (1) _____ We demonstrate high trust in each other. (7)

COLLABORATION

9. The group operates on the basis of every man for himself. _____ We show real concern for trying to help the other person do his job well.